Disaster Response: Keeping Responders Safe



In the panic and shock-filled aftermath of a natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, earthquake, fire or flood, disaster response teams rush in to help clear roads, rescue people, and get utilities and other services back up and running. But, are you doing enough to ensure their safety?

Help Responders Cope with Disaster Response

1. Talk about the emotional and physical strain of disaster response work and how it makes them more vulnerable to stress-induced illnesses.
2. Talk about the signs of emotional exhaustion and stress so crews can keep an eye out on each other.
3. Help them set priorities and pace work to avoid exhaustion. Remind them, they can’t help others if they don’t take care of themselves.
4. Stress the importance of sleep and resuming their normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible.
5. Set and enforce frequent breaks to help fend off exhaustion.

How Does Disaster Response Differ from Regular Work?

Disaster response work has several differences from a normal day on the job – go over these with workers before they get on site:

1. New command structure of an Incident Command System (ICS) with the Incident Site Commander in charge.
2. Exposure to new hazards and new requirements for protective equipment.
3. Unplanned or unscheduled extended work hours.
4. Shortages in supplies, materials, and personnel.
5. Unpredictable response or reaction from the public, motorists, and victims.
6. Stress.

Special Health and Safety Issues

Disasters can create unique health and safety challenges.

Health Health

1. Contamination of water and/or the environment.

2. Disruption of the food supply.
3. Disruption of power and energy.
4. Hygiene.
5. Immunizations.

Safety

1. Pressure to bypass normal safety protocols.
2. Difficulty getting safety gear or materials.
3. Communication and language barriers.
4. An unpredictable or panicked public or motorists.
5. Equipment staging and use.